

## **Why the Empty Tomb Says It All**

*(Sources compiled, not original)*

Without Easter, Christmas is just another story of the birth of a baby. The world is full of babies born in humble places. Without Easter, Christmas is just a birthday party. Without the resurrection, the manger is only a sweet scene on a greeting card. The baby in Bethlehem matters because the tomb in Jerusalem is empty.

**How did the tomb get empty? Produce the body (Habeas Corpus: “You should have the body”).** If the opponents had been able to produce the body of a dead Jesus, that would have been the end of it. But they could not because He was and is alive!

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: “Eliminate all other factors, and the one which remains must be the truth.” “Eliminate the impossible, whatever remains must be the truth.”

**Objection: Jesus’ body would have been unrecognizable after Crucifixion.**

In the very dry climate of Jerusalem, a corpse’s distinctive wounds, stature, hair color, and hair style would have been identifiable *even after 50 days* (the time when the book of Acts says the disciples started proclaiming Christ’s resurrection).

A person could examine the corpse’s physical stature, weight, distinctive wounds (“does this corpse bear wounds consistent with a crucified victim?”), and hair color and style to see if it was consistent with what one would expect Jesus’ body to be like. You don’t even need to be a trained forensic pathologist to do this. Anyone of any educational level could verify these things.

**What are the finite possibilities?**

**Somebody stole the body.**

**They went to the wrong tomb.**

**Jesus did not die but revived in the tomb.**

**Jesus was switched out before crucifixion; thus, He did not die on the cross.**

**The disciples made it up; it’s a legend.**

**Consider the possibilities and their reasonableness or irrationality:**

**Somebody Stole the body—Who?**

**Only three possibilities—disciples/Romans/Jews**

### **1. Disciples stole the body**

- a. Matthew 28:13 says that’s what Jewish leaders told the Roman soldiers to say—Enemy Attestation. Came at night and stole it

while we slept. That's irrational. How could they know if they claimed to have been asleep?

- b. Where would they hide it? Bodies are notoriously difficult to hide. They putrefy and smell, and in the small environment would have been found.
- c. Why would they all suffer martyrdom except John? Why would they die for what they knew was a lie? It's irrational if Jesus did not rise.

"I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, and then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one of them was beaten, tortured, stoned, and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world—and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible."

## **2. Romans stole the body**

Why would they? It would only enflame Jews and Jerusalem.

## **3. Jewish leaders stole the body**

Again—why would they? It would only confirm the Christian faith and enflame Jerusalem. Neither possibility makes sense.

## **The disciples went to the wrong tomb—there was a body in the right tomb**

Joseph and Nicodemus knew where the tomb was. It was Joseph's tomb. Recent archaeological research found only four tombs with a rolled rock cover in the wider area during the Second Temple period. They were all of wealthy individuals—one was that of Herod himself. This was a special tomb.

The women saw them bury Jesus and knew where the tomb was.

Someone sometime would have found the real tomb and the body if they went to the wrong tomb. This suggestion does not make sense either.

## **Jesus did not die on the cross, but only swooned and the coolness of the tomb revived Him and then He either exited or was helped to exit by friends.**

1. He was beaten, crucified, and had a sword pierce His side. Medically He could not have survived. Exposure to a cold, stone, tomb is the exact opposite of what would be needed to revive a body in shock. Typically rewarming must take place.
2. Joseph and Nicodemus would have known if the body they had was not dead. Moderns assume ancients were ignorant, but they had more firsthand exposure to death than do we. First sign: Corneal opacity—clouding of the eyes. Second sign: *Pallor Mortis*—paleness occurs within 15-120 minutes after death.
3. The Conclusive Signs: Mortis Triad: *Algor mortis* (temperature goes down-gets cold). *Liver mortis* (Blood pools at the lowest part of the body and shows discoloration, lividity. As temperature decreases, body becomes stiff (*Rigor mortis*)). These are clearly visible signs anyone can detect—no coroner needed. Roman soldiers were professionals. They knew how to kill people and knew

what someone was dead. Mirror/glass/polished metal test is old—condensation would appear. Feather on lips test. Stick pins under toenails.

- a. If Jesus was alive when put into the tomb, the type of rolling-stone tomb Joseph had was sealed with a large stone—probably weighing close to a ton or more would have precluded His exit. Matthew says it was “big” (Matt. 28:2).
- b. John said the stone was “taken away” (John 20:1), a word that means “raised up,” “carried off,” indicating some distance, by angelic power. The stone was rolled away not to let Jesus out but to let the disciples and women inside to see it was empty. Tomb entrances were 2-4 feet wide and the stones were 4-6 feet in diameter, and one-foot thick. A single healthy man couldn’t have removed it. Jesus could hardly have moved that stone in a weakened (if revived) state. The three women knew they couldn’t roll the stone away. First-century tombs characteristically had a small forecourt that led to the interior features of the tomb, including an inner chamber with benches situated along the walls, often with **arcosolia**, *arched recesses in the wall*, a lower elevation pit (for standing inside the tomb), and tunnel-like niches called *loculi* (Latin) or *kokhim* (Hebrew).
- c. Roman seal and Roman guard. A cord would be stretched across the tomb entrance, sealed with two large blobs of wax or clay on either end. The clay or wax was impressed with a ring or stamp with the official insignia of Rome. Breaking the seal was a direct capital crime, punishable by death.
- d. A strict perimeter around tomb by guards. Undetected access would be virtually impossible. Guarding a Roman-sealed site was serious business, not a casual assignment.
- e. Jewish burial customs followed a specific process. The body would be wrapped in linen with spices layered within the folds to reduce smell. As the spices dried they hardened into a thick cocoon-like structure—extremely heavy and difficult to move. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus brought 75 pounds of spices. Add that to body weight (dead weight) and it’s upwards of 250 pounds. After a year of natural decomposition, the bones were gathered and placed in an ossuary, something like an urn, and reburied in another place, freeing up the expensive rock-cut tomb for future burials.

**Jesus did not die on the cross but He was switched out with Simon of Cyrene, Judas, or some other person—Islam. God made someone else look like Jesus.**

Islam claims Jesus as one of their prophets, whom they call *Isa ibn Maryam*, Jesus, son of Mary.

- a. They claim He did not die on the cross but was switched out with someone else, likely Simon of Cyrene, or that God changed the appearance of another to that of Jesus so that individual could die on the cross.
- b. Problem—Mary, Jesus’ mother, and John were at the foot of the cross and He spoke to them. Joseph and Nicodemus knew what He looked like. Losing a

prisoner condemned to die would bring death penalty to soldiers in charge of crucifixion.

## The Disciples Made It All Up—It's a Legend

### Problems:

- a. **Why would 10 men die martyrs' deaths for something they knew to be a lie?** Well-documented tradition records that all but the Apostle John died martyrs' deaths.
- b. **Legends take generations to form.** First Corinthians 15 was written less than 20 years after the resurrection. Galatians within 15 years. There is more and better documentary evidence for the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus than for any event in ancient history.
- c. **Jesus is likely the most documented person in human history.**
  - a. Thousands of manuscripts, hundreds of archaeological pieces of evidence record His life.
  - b. Alexander the Great has 5-10 fragmentary accounts of his life with a few archaeological pieces of evidence
  - c. Julius Caesar has 2-3 surviving accounts with very limited archaeological evidence
  - d. Cleopatra has 1 fragmentary account with very limited archaeological evidence
- d. **Ancient *non-Christian* sources reveal 9 specific details about Jesus:**
  - a. He existed as a man.
  - b. His personal name was Jesus
  - c. He was called Christos in Greek.
  - d. He had a brother named James (Jacob)
  - e. He won over both Jews and Greeks
  - f. Jewish leaders of the day expressed unfavorable opinions of him
  - g. Pilate rendered the decision he should be executed
  - h. He was executed by crucifixion
  - i. He was executed during the governorship of Pontius Pilate AD 26—36)
- e. **Early critics of Christianity accepted the claims**

Tacitus (AD 56-120) had been Roman governor of Asia Minor: "Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome."

Pliny the Younger (AD 61—113) had been Roman governor of Bythinia: "They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never

to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up.”

Julian the Apostate (AD 331—363 AD): Julian, who became Emperor and attempted to reverse the Christianization of the Roman Empire, never argued that Jesus didn’t exist, that the tomb wasn’t empty, or that the resurrection accounts were invented. His arguments against Christianity were philosophical and theological — he attacked the idea that Jesus was divine, mocked the idea that God would become human, and argued that Christian ethics were inferior to classical virtue.

Suetonius (AD 120): “Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus [Christ], he expelled them from Rome,” speaking of Emperor Claudius.

Lucian of Samosata (AD 166): “The Christians, you know, worship a *man* to this day,—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account....You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws.”

ALTERNATIVES: The resurrection of Jesus is either fiction, fantasy, or gargantuan fraud. It is either the most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever foisted on the minds of man, or it is the most fantastic fact of history.

Back to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s dictum: When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains must be the truth. We have eliminated all the other possibilities— we must conclude:

### **IT REALLY HAPPENED.**

The tomb was empty because Jesus came back to life. He rose from the dead.

**The first people to discover the empty tomb were women.** If this were a made-up story, they would not have chosen women to be the first witnesses. Their testimony was not accepted in court or in society.

Recall the response of the disciples when the women came to them telling them Jesus was alive? Luke 24:11 says, “Their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.” “Idle tales” is the Greek word ληρος. It means “nonsense,” “prattle,” “gossip.”

Peter didn’t believe it. John didn’t believe it. They had to see the tomb themselves.

**Post-resurrection appearances.** They saw Jesus. They ate with Him. They touched Him. Not AI, a hallucination, or a hologram. He was and is a real person.

Scripture describes at least 10 distinct appearances of Christ between the resurrection and ascension. He appeared to:

- 1) Mary Magdalene at the tomb (Mark 16:9; John 20:11–18);
- 2) to the women on the road (Matt. 28:9–10);
- 3) to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–32); 4) to Peter (Luke 24:34);
- 5) to 10 of the 11 disciples, Thomas being absent (Luke 24:36–43; Mark 16:14; John 20:19–25);
- 6) to the 11 disciples (with Thomas present) eight days later (John 20:26–31);
- 7) to seven disciples by the shore of the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1–25);
- 8) to more than 500 disciples, probably on a mountain in Galilee (1 Cor. 15:6);
- 9) to James (1 Cor. 15:7); and
- 10) to the apostles when he ascended into heaven (Acts 1:3–11). After his ascension, he appeared to Paul (1 Cor. 15:8). The next time he appears it will be in glory (Matt. 24:30).

### **WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

Romans 4:25. He was delivered (crucified) for our offences (sins). He was raised again for our justification (because we have been made right with God).

He died because of and in place of us. He was raised to show the sin-debt had been paid in full.

**John 14:19:** Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.

**Because He lives, We Too Shall Live.**

### **The Empty Tomb**

- 1. Confirms Jesus Is Who He Claimed**
- 2. Means the Atonement Worked**
- 3. Death Has Been Defeated**
- 4. Provides a Living Savior, Not a Dead Hero**
- 5. Validates Every Promise Jesus Made**
- 6. Provides the Pattern for Our Resurrection**
- 7. Proves This World Matters to God—He sent His Son to die for our sin.**
- 8. Changes How We Face Our Own Deaths**

Paul explained it in 1 Corinthians 15:15-19

“And if Christ be not risen, then *is* our preaching vain, and your faith *is* also vain.

Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not

Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith *is* vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”